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SUBJECT: THE PRESIDENT ON KOSOVO STATUS: KOSOVO WEEKLY
UPDATE (6/11-6/15)

¶1. (SBU) Summary: In the wake of the President's visit to the region and direct statements on the need to move towards independence for Kosovo, post sustained an aggressive public campaign to reinforce the President's comments. The Ambassador's public comments this week countered Serbian officials' triumphalism over failure of the Ahtisaari Plan that continued unabated after Prime Minister Kostunica's sharp response to the President's comments and his own meeting with Russian President Putin in St. Petersburg. Kostunica's response to the President sparked several days of public exchange between GOS officials and the Ambassador. Other major Serbian figures, including President Tadic, continue in lockstep with Kostunica on Kosovo and are uniformly entrenching against international recognition of Kosovo -- especially by the USG -- without a UNSC resolution. End Summary.

Kostunica Reacts Strongly to President's Comments

¶2. (U) The President's direct comments during his visit to Europe on the need for Kosovo independence attracted widespread attention in Belgrade and drew a strong response from Prime Minister Kostunica. All Belgrade media prominently reported the President's Kosovo-related comments in Rome, Tirana and Sofia with particular attention to his statement that the USG "will have to say - it's enough, Kosovo is independent."

¶3. (U) Kostunica, fresh from a meeting with Russian President Putin in St. Petersburg, said that Serbs will "never forgive" the United States if it gives their Kosovo province to Kosovo Albanians and that Serbia was "justifiably disgusted" by USG policy. According to Reuters, Kostunica said "the U.S. has a right to support certain states and peoples in accordance with its interests, but not by making them a present of something which doesn't belong to it."

¶4. (U) In even stronger language, Kostunica called the "U.S. bombing of Serbia" -- not NATO -- "a big enough mistake for last century and this one as well," and that "supporting one-sided independence for Kosovo would be a fresh mistake, a further act of unjustified violence, which would not be forgotten by the Serbian people." "If America wants to ignore international law," Kostunica warned, "Serbia will reject and dismiss any form of independence for its southern province." Finally, Kostunica said, "The United States has to find some other way to express its love and affection for the Albanians instead of giving them Serbian territory as a present."

15. (U) FM Jeremic was not as pointed, but took the opportunity to call the President's comments as having "the aim of strengthening the U.S. negotiating position ahead of a forthcoming Security Council debate, where his country has a very strong standing. Our position is opposed to that [stance], as are the positions of some other council members, not only those with the right of veto."

16. (U) In response, the Ambassador conveyed disappointment at the GOS' harsh rhetoric. Serbian media gave wide coverage to the Ambassador's 6/13 statement during which he explained that the U.S. has never used such rhetoric when it comes to Serbia, and that the U.S. respects Serbia and its position on Kosovo, though the U.S. simply does not agree with it. The Ambassador noted that despite his disappointment with certain Serbian officials, bilateral should not suffer as a result.

17. (U) After a public event at a local high school on 6/14 during which the Ambassador was asked several questions about Kosovo, Education Minister (and DSS member) Zoran Loncar, accused the Ambassador of "unusual behavior." Loncar, mischaracterizing the situation, said it was "outside diplomatic standards" for ambassadors of foreign countries to address high school students with "political speeches, particularly on issues related to Kosovo." Among the most notable comments by the group of High School students the Ambassador addressed was the acknowledgment that one could be a Serbian patriot and concede that Serbia was going to become independent.

18. (U) On 6/15, Belgrade media reported the Ambassador's further comments to the press that there can be no other solution apart from supervised independence for the future status of Kosovo and that the U.S. and European partners have made it clear that there can be no compromise on this

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issue. The Ambassador rejected reports of Russian criticism of the recent U.S., UK, German, French, and Italian meeting in Paris on the subject of Kosovo. He explained that this had obviously not been a CG meeting, since Russia did not attend, but simply a meeting of countries working together on finding a solution for the Kosovo status, and determining how to coordinate with Russia on finding a solution for adopting a UNSC resolution.

19. (U) Belgrade media also focused on U/S Burns and A/S Fried's comments on Kosovo while in Europe. The media reported U/S Burns as saying in Athens that the Ahtisaari plan is the only possible solution in Kosovo and that the USG will continue to engage UNSC members on the issue. The press also reported that Burns said Europe and the USG should remain united and work to convince Russia that independence was the only way forward. Serbian news agency Tanjug reported on 6/13 that A/S Fried reiterated that Kosovo is a unique case that could not be applied to other regions.

110. (U) Returning from Brussels after attending a meeting of NATO and PfP ministers, Defense Minister Sutanovac chose to raise Kosovo in noting that Serbia will never accept Kosovo's independence, nor will it give up Euro-Atlantic values. Like Kostunica, he reiterated that the Kosovo status settlement must respect Serbia's territorial integrity and sovereignty while allowing citizens of Albanian nationality in Kosovo to achieve all their justifiable demand for self-rule.

Other Diplomatic Activity

111. (U) Belgrade media noted the arrival in quick succession of three of the Contact Group nations'

representatives to Kosovo on 6/15. B92 noted that Ambassador Wisner, British European Affairs Director Anthony Smith, and Italian Foreign Minister D'Alema arrived in Pristina within a day of each other. D'Alema will have meetings with Serbian leaders in Belgrade on 6/15.

¶12. (U) EU: All media reported that the EC reiterated that the decision on the future status of Kosovo must be made at the UNSC, and that it should be based on Ahtisaari's plan. Addressing a news conference in Brussels, spokesperson for EU Commissioner for Enlargement Olli Rehn refused, however, to elaborate on President Bush's statement in Tirana that Kosovo would be independent. B92 did note Rehn's comment about Serbia's relationship with Russia, reporting his quote that "it is important to recall that one has to be careful that when hugging even a friendly big bear, one wouldn't be suffocated."

¶13. (U) NATO: Commander, Allied Joint Force Command Naples Admiral Henry Ulrich arrived in Belgrade on 6/15 for a day of meetings with Serbian officials. Admiral Ulrich met with the Ambassador before meetings with the PM, President, FM, Defense Minister and CHOD Ponos. Admiral Ulrich will release a public statement through the NATO liaison office in Belgrade later in the day.

¶14. (U) Germany: Vecernje Novosti reported on 6/15 that German FM Steinmeier said that Kosovo status would not be resolved until July due to Putin's visit to the U.S. Steinmeier also noted the difficulty of maintaining EU unity on Kosovo and stressed that EU unity would suffer if there is unilateral recognition of without a UNSC resolution.

¶15. (SBU) Comment: Kostunica's direct and angry response to the President represents a concerted shift in GOS strategy from attacking the UN process and Ahtisaari to solely holding "U.S. policy" accountable for the push for Kosovo independence. Our European colleagues are spared as Kostunica -- already revitalized from his talks with Putin -- hopes to pare the other Contact Group members away from their avowed commitment to a swift UNSC resolution based on the Ahtisaari plan. Tadic, Jeremic and the rest of coalition members should not be expected to resist this new tack. End Comment.

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